March 14, 2003

1420 East 6th Ave.
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Environmental Quality Council
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
    Fisheries Division
    Endangered Species Coordinator
    Native Species Coordinator, Fisheries
    Missoula Office
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Lewis and Clark Conservation District, 790 Colleen Street, Helena, MT 59601
Helena National Forest, 2880 Skyway Drive, Helena, MT 59601
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Lewis and Clark County, P.O. Box 1725, Helena, MT 59624
Jim Robinson, 576 South Davis Street, Helena, MT 59601
Hydrotech Water Resource Consultants, 1617 Euclid Ave., Suite #1, Helena, MT 59601

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The Program tentatively plans to provide funding to a project calling for the replacement of three undersized culverts on the North and South Forks of Poorman Creek with bridges or with bottomless arch pipes. The intent of the project is to improve upstream fish passage for westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. This proposed project is located approximately 8 miles southeast of the town of Lincoln in Lewis and Clark County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., April 16, 2003 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. Completion of this project is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432. Please note that this draft EA will be considered as final if no substantive comments are received by the deadline listed above.

Sincerely,

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection Bureau
Fisheries Division
e-mail: mlere@state.mt.us

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Poorman Creek Culvert Replacement Project

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-272 through 273 that directs the Department to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The program involves physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in rivers and lakes for the purpose of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. Additionally, the 1999 Montana legislature amended statute sections 87-1-273, 15-38-202 and Section 5, Chapter 463, Laws of 1995 to create a bull trout and cutthroat trout enhancement program. The program calls for the enhancement of bull trout and cutthroat trout through habitat restoration, natural reproduction and reductions in species competition by way of the Future Fisheries Program.

The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide funding for a project calling for the replacement of three existing under-sized culverts, located on the North and South Forks Poorman Creek, with bridges or with bottomless arch pipes. The intent of the project is to improve upstream fish passage for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. Poorman Creek is a 3rd order tributary to the upper Blackfoot River. Two of the culverts are located on stream crossings that have shared responsibility between Lewis and Clark County and the Helena National Forest. The third culvert is owned and maintained by a private landowner. These stream crossings are located approximately 8 miles southeast of the town of Lincoln in Lewis and Clark County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on the North and South Forks of Poorman Creek located approximately 8 miles southeast of the town of Lincoln within Township 13 North, Range 7 West, Section 19 in Lewis and Clark County.

II. Need for the Project: One goal within Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks six-year operations plan for the fisheries program is to "restore and enhance degraded habitats" by implementing habitat restoration projects and administering the Future Fisheries Improvement Program to restore important habitats on public and private lands. This proposed project would help achieve this goal.

Poorman Creek is a 3rd order tributary to the upper Blackfoot River that has the potential for becoming an important spawning area for fluvial bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. Poorman Creek is one of the highest priority tributaries in the Blackfoot drainage identified for restoration efforts. The culverts identified for replacement in this project are located approximately 10 miles upstream from the mouth. The U.S. Forest Service has prioritized these culverts as high to moderate for replacement because of their inability to adequately accommodate run-off events and their risk of failure. These culverts likely act as selective upstream passage barriers for migrating fish at high flows because of high water velocities and at low flows because of the lack of adequate water depth. Replacing these existing culverts will enhance the passage of migrant spawners and, as a result, likely will lead to enhanced recruitment of trout to the upper Blackfoot River. The upper Blackfoot River is considered to be a recruitment limited system.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to replace three undersized round culverts, two located on the North Fork and one

located on the South Fork, with bridges or with bottomless arch pipes. Installation of these structures would follow design requirements as called for by Lewis and Clark County and by the Helena National Forest. The span of the new crossings would meet or exceed the bankfull width of the stream channel. This project is expected to cost approximately $75,000.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to $11,680.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Enhancing fish passage in Poorman Creek by replacing three under-sized culverts is expected to increase recruitment of westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout to the creek and to the upper Blackfoot River. The upper Blackfoot River is considered a recruitment limited system. As a result, the project is expected to enhance westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout populations in both Poorman Creek and the Blackfoot River.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short-term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, construction will occur during a low flow period and operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. The Department of Environmental Quality will be contacted to determine narrative conditions required to meet short-term water quality standards and protect aquatic biota. A 124 permit (Stream Protection Act) will be obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and a 310 permit (Streambed and Land Preservation Act) will be obtained from the local conservation district. The U.S. Army Corp of Engineers will be contacted for requirements needed to meet the federal Clean Water Act (404 permit).

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils within the immediate project area would be disturbed during construction, but would be stabilized with re-vegetation efforts (sowing seed).

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation and cover would be disturbed within the immediate project area during the period of construction. However, proposed re-vegetation efforts would act to mitigate these disturbances.

5. Aesthetics

Aesthetics of the site would be degraded during the short time frame of construction due to ground disturbance and the presence of heavy equipment. Long-term impacts to aesthetics would be

negligible.

7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources.

Poorman Creek supports fluvial and resident westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. Westslope cutthroat trout is a species of special concern in Montana and bull trout are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Replacing these three undersized culverts will enhance upstream fish passage and will enhance the recruitment of these two fish species to the creek and upper Blackfoot River. Because Poorman Creek supports bull trout, a listed species, the project will be included in Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Section 6 conservation plan with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

The proposed project may require an individual Army Corp of Engineers 404 permit. Therefore, the State Historic Preservation Office will be contacted to determine the need for compliance with the federal historic preservation regulations. The project will not begin until a cultural clearance is granted.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

7. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

Poorman Creek is a perennial tributary to the upper Blackfoot River that has the potential to provide important spawning and rearing habitat for westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. Enhancing fish passage at three existing undersized culverts, located about 10 miles upstream from the mouth, would increase recruitment of trout to the upper Blackfoot River. Since the upper Blackfoot River is considered to be a recruitment limited system, enhancing trout reproduction in Poorman Creek is expected to improve recreational fishing in the river.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, these three culverts on Poorman Creek will continue to act as selective barriers to fish migration. As such, the passage of fluvial westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout from the upper Blackfoot River will continue to be hindered and the potential for recruitment will remain reduced.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to enhance fish passage at three culvert crossings located on the South and North forks of Poorman Creek. Poorman Creek has the potential of providing important spawning and rearing habitat for fluvial westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. Enhancing fish passage at these culvert crossings would increase recruitment of trout to the stream and upper Blackfoot River. Enhancing trout reproduction in Poorman Creek is expected to improve

recreational fishing in the Blackfoot River.

VIII. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section

1. Is an EIS required? No.

   We conclude from this review that the proposed activities will have a positive impact on the physical and human environment.

2. Level of public involvement.

   The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission and will be contingent upon their approval. The Environmental Assessment (EA) is being distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter. The EA will be published on Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks web page: fwp.state.mt.us.

3. Duration of comment period?

   Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on April 16, 2003.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

   Mark Lere, Program Officer
   Habitat Protection Bureau
   Fisheries Division
   Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
   1420 East 6th Avenue
   Helena, MT 59620

   Telephone: (406) 444-2432
   e-mail: mlere@state.mt.us

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS
1420 E 6th Ave, PO BOX 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701
(406) 444-2535

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Title Poorman Creek Culvert Replacement Project

Division/Bureau Fisheries Division -Future Fisheries Improvement

Description of Project The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide funding to a project calling for the replacement of three existing undersized culverts, located on the North and South Forks of Poorman Creek, with bridges or with bottomless arch pipes. The intent of the project is to improve upstream fish passage for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. Two of the culverts are located on stream crossings that have shared responsibility between Lewis and Clark County and the Helena National Forest. The third culvert is owned and maintained by a private landowner. The stream crossings are located approximately 8 miles southeast of the town of Lincoln in Lewis and Clark County.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Terrestrial & aquatic life and habitats			X			X
2. Water quality, quantity & distribution			X			X
3. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture			X			X
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality			X			X
5. Aesthetics			X			X
6. Air quality				X		
7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources			X			X
8. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		X

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Social structures & mores				X		
2. Cultural uniqueness & diversity				X		
3. Local & state tax base & tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural or industrial production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational and wilderness activities			X			X
8. Quantity & distribution of employment				X		
9. Distribution & density of population & housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial & commercial activity				X		
12. Demands for energy				X		
13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals				X		
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows				X		

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction Helena National Forest, Lewis and Clark County, Lewis and Clark County Conservation District, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corp of Engineers, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation Office

Individuals or groups contributing to this EA Hydrotech Water Resource Consultants

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.
EA prepared by: Mark Lere
Date: March 7, 2003